

to finish health care next year to move ahead to jobs. We have the issues of global warming and climate control, and we have the problems with the Mideast peace process and the difficulties in Iran and North Korea and Afghanistan. We need a strong President, and we need a Congress which has the courage to act and the tenacity and willingness to confront tough problems. We need to show the American people that it is not all gridlock here, that it is not all desperate, desolate partisan politics.

So my vote will be in favor of the bill. Although I am, frankly, disappointed and I share the frustration expressed by many people who say go back and start again, this is a significant step forward. We have a great chance to improve it in conference, and beyond that there will be another Congress. And with the analogy of civil rights legislation, we can get the public option and get greater public involvement for the benefit of the American people.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

Mr. President, in the absence of any other Senator seeking recognition, I ask unanimous consent to speak up to 3 minutes on another subject.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMERICANS HELD BY IRAN

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, there has been wide publicity given to three young Americans who were taken into custody by Iran and the recent reports that they are going to be tried in an Iranian court. Senator CASEY and I, in the Senate, introduced a resolution urging the Iranians to release those three young Americans—Congresswoman ALLYSON SCHWARTZ, on the House side, did so in the past—and it is my hope Iran will change its view.

I was talking to the Syrian Ambassador yesterday, who advised me that when the five British citizens were taken into custody by Iran, the Government of Great Britain made a request of the Syrian Government to use their good offices to secure the release of the five British citizens. That request was made via Syria, and they were released.

I have written to and contacted the State Department since that meeting yesterday afternoon to find out what is the status of U.S. activity because if we have not asked the Syrians for help, my view is that we should. It would be my hope that with the very difficult problems facing the United States in Iran, that Iran would relinquish the custody of those three young Americans and release them to their family and friends, especially at this time of the year.

I have been an advocate of dialog with Iran for years. I have tried to go to Iran since 1989, when the Iran-Iraq war ended. Senator SHELBY and I got to Iraq and met Saddam Hussein, but as yet we have not had an interparliamentary exchange, which I have sought for a long time with the Iranians.

It would be my hope that Iran, for humanitarian reasons, would release these people and that we would exercise our best efforts—the U.S. Government working through Syria or whatever other channel we can find—to secure their release.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KIRK). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, before the Senate now is an issue of funding our military, the Department of Defense appropriations bill. This is a bill that is critically important because it provides the funding our men and women in uniform now risking their lives while we meet in the safety of our businesses and offices and homes in America, it funds their needs to make sure they will be safe to perform their missions effectively and come home. Without fail, every year this bill comes before the Senate and is a consensus bipartisan bill.

Regardless of our debates over foreign policy, we all want the men and women in uniform to know we stand behind them. As a consequence, this bill usually passes with an overwhelming number. I asked how this bill fared in the House of Representatives when it was considered yesterday. The vote was 395 to 34. There were 164 Republicans who voted yes on this bill. It was clearly an overwhelmingly positive bipartisan vote. There is no reason it would not be the same in the Senate.

But there is a problem. The problem is this: Tomorrow the funding for our troops runs out. It is the end of our continuing resolution in funding. We are not going to leave them high and dry, but we are going to leave them uncertain if we don't act decisively and quickly. Why would we do this to them?

Military families across America, as we go into the holiday season, I am sure, are saddened by the absence of their loved ones who may be in Iraq or Afghanistan, saddened by a separation from children and other loved ones they would like to avoid in their lifetime but they have offered it up for this great country. With this kind of uncertainty and sadness and emotion, why would we be uncertain when it comes to funding our troops?

Here is where we are: We offered this yesterday. We said: Let's vote for it. Let's vote for our troops and get this behind us so the Department of Defense appropriations bill was clear.

The other side of the aisle said: No. We want you to go through all of the hurdles that you have to go through under the procedures of the Senate for the most controversial bills. We want

you to file a cloture motion which would put an end to a filibuster. We want you to fill the tree with amendments so that this bill isn't assaulted.

Believe me, the terminology would lose most people, including many Senators, but the bottom line is this: Instead of just doing what we know needs to be done and what should be done, Republicans have insisted we delay this process for at least 2 days.

Why? Why would we want to delay funding our troops in the middle of a war? Why would we want to say to our troops that the military pay raise they were counting on so their families can get by back home, and for those stationed in the United States, make sure that they have what they need, why would we say to them that we are going to raise a question as to whether we are going to put \$29.2 billion into the defense health program, the health program for our military members and their families?

Why would the Republicans insist on delaying a vote for \$472 million for family advocacy programs for military families who are separated, many of whom are going through extraordinary stress because of the separation? Why would they want to delay a pay raise for the military? Why would they want to delay \$154 billion for equipment and training for our military?

I don't understand it. It would seem to me that we ought to come together by noon today and say: Let's do this. Let's not waste another minute in terms of helping our troops and showing them we stand behind them. But, no, the decision has been made on the other side of the aisle that we are going to delay this matter until tomorrow.

They say in politics, for every decision there is a real reason and a good reason. There may be some good reason they are giving on the other side of the aisle for delaying funding our troops, but the real reason is their hope that they can stop health care reform in the Senate. That is what is behind this. The lengths to which those on the other side of the aisle will go was demonstrated yesterday.

We had a defining moment when the leadership on the Senate Republican side insisted, through Senator COBURN of Oklahoma, that an 800-page amendment be read by the clerk. It is the right of a Senator to ask for that. It is an archaic right because people don't sit here hanging on every word to understand an amendment. That never happens. It didn't happen yesterday. But the clerk started reading.

Almost 2 hours into it, it was pretty clear that it would take 10 hours to finish this 800-page amendment, despite the best efforts of the clerk's office. Why did the Senate Republican leadership want to take 10 hours out of a day for something that was meaningless—the reading, word by word, line by line, page by page, of an 800-page amendment? To stop debate on health care reform.